

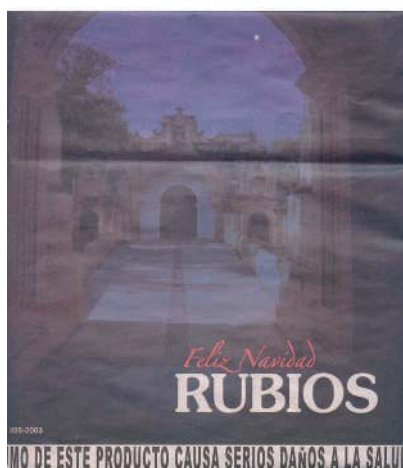
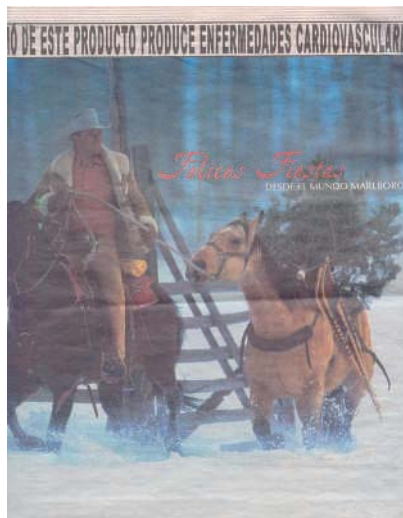
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When the “Yes, Prime Minister” team was considering topics for future episodes, Eddington suggested they cover the tobacco epidemic, and telephoned ASH to tell them to expect a call from the writers. The show’s central character, James Hacker MP, thought he was in charge of things but in reality was all too dependent on and manipulated by civil servants, led by the scheming Sir Humphrey Appleby. Sir Humphrey, whose agenda was usually somewhat different from that of his political master, was not immune to being manipulated himself, so the series was a natural for taking a satirical look at one of the greatest scandals of political negligence of our time.

The writers set to work on their research, including discussions with key public health people, to learn what went on behind the scenes to try to ensure that cigarette sales continued to flourish undisturbed. The ensuing episode, “The Smokescreen”, broadcast in 1986, was as hard hitting as it was hilarious, and can still be found in use as an entertaining teaching aid in discerning schools of public health the world over. At one point, in a robust defence of inaction encompassing many of the classic tobacco industry arguments and sophistries, Sir Humphrey pleaded with Hacker to recognise the economic heroism of smokers whose tobacco tax helped fund the health service, but whose early deaths relieved the state from having to pay their pensions: “We are saving many more lives than we otherwise could because of those smokers who voluntarily lay down their lives for their friends.” Incredible though it now seems, it was but a modest paraphrase of what some industry briefed politicians were saying at the time.

## Guatemala: snow stopping ‘em

Some interesting examples of horses for courses in tobacco advertising were to be seen early this year in Guatemalan newspapers. Snow is about as common in Guatemala as palm trees in Antarctica, but when you are selling a myth to educated people, you can use a wide range of reference points. Philip Morris’s Marlboro brand is mostly smoked by the higher and middle socio-economic classes, so a pretty cowboy



Philip Morris ads for two of its brands marketed in Guatemala: snow and cowboys for upmarket Marlboro smokers, more traditional Guatemalan scenes for its local Rubios brand.

scene with snow is no barrier when wishing people a happy holiday season from the world of Marlboro.

However, Philip Morris also makes the local Rubios brand, smoked mainly by

people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, so for its “Merry Christmas” ad, a traditional Guatemalan scene, with a starlit courtyard looking suitably nativity-like for the Catholic audience, was more appropriate. It is all a long way from the total ad ban that is so urgently needed in Guatemala, as in all countries where tobacco promotion is still permitted. The big question is whether the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which Guatemala has already signed, will succeed in banishing ads like these for good—traditional scenes, cowboys, snow and all.

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## Sri Lanka: exploiting the fallen

It is hard to believe that a tobacco company, responsible for pushing products that cause thousands of premature deaths every year, would have the nerve to sponsor a shrine to those who gave their lives for their fellow citizens, far less plaster its company logo all over it. But British American Tobacco’s (BAT’s) subsidiary in Sri Lanka, CTC, which shares the parent company’s none-too-subtle golden tobacco leaf as a logo, has done just that, at the National Remembrance Park opened in October 2002 in Kandy district, in the centre of the country.

CTC’s name and logo appear not only on signs leading visitors to and around the park, but prominently engraved for posterity on a stone memorial tablet at the solemn heart of the place, above the inscription: “In sincere appreciation of those who sacrificed their lives for our nation so that we may live in peace.”



BAT’s golden tobacco leaf logo is prominently displayed on a stone memorial tablet in Sri Lanka’s National Remembrance Park.